

Planning the Future of Big Egg Island

Potsdam Summer School Prepares Participants for the Challenges Presented by Change in the Arctic

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The kick-off of the [Potsdam Summer School](#) on the “Arctic in the Anthropocene” set the tone for two weeks of exploring policy and science questions together in a multidisciplinary way: talks by representatives of the Potsdam institutes organising the summer school, experts on sustainability and the Arctic, and a member of the Saami, an indigenous group in the Arctic, provided insights into the changing Arctic. The next three days were focused on the natural sciences with lectures and discussions on the basic elements of the Arctic climate system, including glaciers, sea ice, permafrost, and marine systems, which were delivered at the Albert Einstein Campus by scientists from the Alfred Wegener Institute, the Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI), the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ), and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK).

The [Summer School](#) – the first such event to be held in Potsdam – was organized by several Potsdam-based research institutes that are actively studying the Arctic. In addition to the [Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies \(IASS\)](#), they include the [University of Potsdam](#), the [Helmholtz Centre Potsdam – German Research Centre for Geosciences \(GFZ\)](#), the [Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research \(AWI\)](#) and the [Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research \(PIK\)](#). 38 up-and-coming scholars from 26 countries discussed urgent matters concerning climate change in the Arctic from 23 June to 4 July 2014.

During a day at the University of Potsdam, a rich set of discussions dubbed “science-policy duets” captured a number of areas in the Arctic in which science and policy intersect. These included discussions of black carbon - the main element of soot -, fresh-water systems in the Arctic, which face emerging threats, the challenge of communicating complex topics on climate, and Arctic shipping and transport focusing on the likelihood of increased Arctic shipping traffic and the development of the [IMO Polar Code](#).

Talks on Arctic governance, planning processes and international geopolitical concerns in the Arctic made up the transition from the first week to the second. The highlight was an exercise to plan the future of Kwan K’iit, or Big Egg Island. Kwan K’iit is a fictitious island located in the Arctic and Subarctic. It faces socio-economic and environmental challenges ranging from outmigration to deteriorating fish stocks, among others. Promising resource exploitation projects excite some outside investors and residents alike. At the same time, indigenous peoples are trying to connect with new opportunities while staying true to their culture and history. Calls for transitioning the island following new sustainable paradigms parting with old economic ‘truths’ can be heard.

Summer School participants were divided into stakeholder groups. These ranged from local stakeholders (indigenous groups, food providers, environmental NGOs) to government (federal, territorial), industry (mining, oil and gas, logging, renewable energy), and an advisory panel consisting of natural and social scientists. Every participant was given an individual secret agenda to follow. Of course, agendas often contrasted greatly within and among stakeholder groups. This led to realistic challenges in the planning exercise: What were we planning for? How were we going to achieve our

goals? What was best for Kwan K'iit? After two and a half days of the exercise, the participants increasingly found their role in the process and were able to agree upon a vision including concrete steps (oil exploitation, sigh) to move forward. During a thorough debriefing session, it became clear that mutual trust and active communication are among the foundations for reaching agreement.

Land-use planning processes have significantly shaped (or re-shaped) the political landscape of the Arctic and Subarctic in recent decades. Aboriginal land claims settlements in Canada provide a concrete example of the need to constructively adjudicate between different claims to access, autonomy, or power. In that sense, the planning exercise was a useful, realistic resemblance of Northern governance. However, the sometimes tedious, low-energy process left some participants physically exhausted. This can be seen as further evidence, however, that the exercise truly mirrored land-use planning meetings in the 'real world.'